

97-84214-4

Communist Party of  
Great Britain

The Communist Party, the  
Labour Party...

London

[1922?]

97-84214-4  
MASTER NEGATIVE #

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES  
PRESERVATION DIVISION

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC MICROFORM TARGET

ORIGINAL MATERIAL AS FILMED - EXISTING BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

Communist Party of Great Britain. The Communist Party, the Labour Party & the united front; a thesis defining the attitude of the Communist Party towards the Labour Party. London, Communist Party of Great Britain [1922?]

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: Reproductions may not be made without permission from Columbia University Libraries.

### TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm

REDUCTION RATIO: 9:1

IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA  IB  IIB

DATE FILMED: 10-7-97

INITIALS: PB

TRACKING #: 27981

FILMED BY PRESERVATION RESOURCES, BETHLEHEM, PA.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC IRREGULARITIES

**MAIN ENTRY:** Communist Party of Great Britain

The Communist Party, the Labour Party & the united front

### Bibliographic Irregularities in the Original Document:

List all volumes and pages affected; include name of institution if filming borrowed text.

Page(s) missing/not available: \_\_\_\_\_

Volume(s) missing/not available: \_\_\_\_\_

Illegible and/or damaged page(s): front cover missing the beginning word "The"  
\_\_\_\_\_

Page(s) or volume(s) misnumbered: \_\_\_\_\_

Bound out of sequence: \_\_\_\_\_

Page(s) or volume(s) filmed from copy borrowed from: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Inserted material: \_\_\_\_\_

TRACKING#: MSH27981

THE COMMUNIST  
PARTY, THE LABOUR  
PARTY & THE UNITED  
FRONT  *A Thesis defining  
the attitude of the Communist Party  
towards the Labour Party* 



PUBLISHED BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY  
OF GREAT BRITAIN at No. 16 KING STREET  
*near COVENT GARDEN - LONDON - W.C.2.*  
PRICE · ONE · PENNY



## THE COMMUNIST PARTY, THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE UNITED FRONT *& A DEFINITION OF THE COMMUNIST ATTITUDE*

1. The class struggle inherent in capitalist society, and widely organised on both sides before the European War, has been greatly intensified in Great Britain in consequence of the war.

Quite apart from the vast destruction and wastage wrought in every direction, on either side the issues have become clearer as a direct result of its influence. On the one hand, the capitalists accumulated enormous profits during the war, and are unwilling to give them up. They secretly perfected their own organisations (during the period when trade unions were giving up their most cherished rights in the name of patriotism), and are now determined not to return to the pre-war state of affairs.

In the course of the war they had the opportunity of using the mechanism of the State to achieve concentrated control, on a vast and unprecedented scale, over every part and detail of the nation's economic life, and they are determined not to abandon this absolute and unquestioned autocracy.

To this end, after a series of successful attacks on the industrial field which began in 1921 (the lock-out of the miners), they entered upon the political arena in May, 1922, with the Trade Union Act Amendment Bill.

On the other hand, the workers during the war were taught by every possible means, from their own experience to the direct propaganda of the capitalist Press, that the modern community reposes solely upon the foundation of labour, which carries the fate of civilisation in its hands, in the trenches as in the munition works, in the mercantile marine as in the docks, on the railways as in the mines. Psychologically, the British workers emerged from the war more independent, more resolute, more exacting, in their conception of what is a decent standard of living. This attitude was strengthened by the definite improvement in material welfare which was experienced by certain im-

portant groups of the working class which held the key positions in the labour front during the war.

The great resolve of the British proletariat to make once for all impossible the hopeless vista of unending exploitation that lay before the average worker in pre-war days found expression, industrially, in the enormous development of the trade unions between 1918 and 1920, and politically in the equally marked impetus given to the organisation of the Labour Party. The popularity of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council movement in 1917 amongst the most advanced sections of the working class was a foreshadowing of the yearning present amongst the bulk of the masses for closer class organisation to achieve a new social order.

2 The Labour Party, at its commencement in 1900, was the result of the initiative shown by a group of Socialists with the object of securing the "better representation of Labour." So long as this general aim remained the principal incentive to action on the parliamentary field, the membership affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee inevitably remained small compared with the size and tasks of the Labour movement. It could only command the support of that advanced minority in the Trade Union Congress which was ready to accept a general Socialist rallying cry.

But the membership increased with a bound from 469,000 to 861,000 in 1903, when the Taff Vale decision levelled a threat at union funds that could only be met by legislation. From this time it went on increasing steadily, gaining strength year by year as the struggle with capital became more intense (for example, the unemployment crisis of the winter of 1908 had the effect of increasing the membership of the Labour Party from 1,158,000 to 1,486,000).

The Osborne judgment of 1900, which made it necessary once again to seek special legislation in order to protect the very right of organised labour to enter into parliamentary politics, in reality served to intensify the consciousness amongst the organised workers that the Labour Party was their special spokesman against the capitalist class, as the steady growth of membership figures show. The war, finally, spurred on this process anew, the membership expanding from 2 millions in 1915 to 2½ millions in 1917, and 4.3 millions in 1920, falling slightly to 4 millions in 1921.

The vast bulk of this membership is constituted by the affiliations *en bloc* of trade unions, which increased from 350,000 in 1900 to 3.9 millions in 1921, while the membership through affiliated Socialist societies only increased during the same period from 23,000 to 37,000. The Labour Party has almost from the outset, therefore, been before everything the organisation for political action of the primary mass organisations of the British proletariat—the trade unions.

3. The Socialist parties affiliated to the Labour Party have throughout represented but an insignificant minority from the point of view of numbers. In 1900 the proportion they bore to the trade union affiliations was as 1 to 16; by 1905 the proportion they bore was as 1 to 53; and the proportion has become even smaller since 1922 (1 to 107). But their influence within the Labour Party has been immensely greater than these figures would suggest.

The reason for this becomes clear when we analyse the internal development of the Labour Party from the class standpoint. During the first year or two of the Party's existence it was definitely the handiwork of a small group of Socialists, who were partly proletarian and partly middle-class (like most Socialist groups at the beginning of the twentieth century), but who, at any rate, were sufficiently identified with the revolutionary aspect of the class struggle to keep the membership to a restricted minority of the workers. But it is most significant that even during this period, 1900 to 1903, there was the sharpest conflict between precisely the middle-class and the working-class tendencies in the Labour Representation Committee, typified respectively by the I.L.P. and S.D.F.

The conflicts took place over the question of whether the Labour Party should adopt a revolutionary class programme declaring for the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and permit its candidates openly to declare themselves as Socialists. At conference after conference, to the time of unity in Labour's ranks, the leaders of the I.L.P. energetically opposed every attempt to proclaim Socialism as the objective of the Labour Party or to allow candidates to declare themselves as Socialists. In this policy they had active and powerful allies in the middle-class Fabian Society led by G. B. Shaw and Sidney Webb. The Fabian tracts and essays were prepared with the specific object of *promoting a practical and constitutional policy of collectivist reform* as against revolutionary class action.

The middle-class Socialist current was already preparing the way for its own spiritual domination over the non-Socialist trade union leaders at the expense of the very foundations of its theory of collaboration with working class Socialist thought.

The picture changes abruptly when we enter the period of 1903-1914, in which the Labour Party became to all intents and purposes an association of trade unions to defend their individual rights. There was no idea as yet of a common Labour programme; the several unions entered the Party at different times, as their own circumstances dictated, and used its machinery to promote the interests of their own organisation. This is strikingly shown in the system by which Labour candidates to Parliament were nominated and supported financially, not by the common organisation, but by their own union. This condition of things still exists. Its effects during the decade 1903-1914 were far-reaching. A Labour Party which was ruled and organised primarily by officials of independent and often warring unions inevitably became entirely divorced from the Socialist or revolutionary idea. Its leaders, in their overwhelming majority, were financial and otherwise no longer members of the working class, but of the middle class. They were often Liberals, and might be Conservatives, in all else but defence of their own unions, finances and privileges. (This was particularly noticeable, again, in the Parliamentary group.)

Thus, even before the war, the Labour Party had become quite distinctly a class organisation of the *proletariat* which was dominated by that section of the *middle* class whose profession it was to organise trade unions. And, naturally, if that section, or a part of it, sought and found expression in a political party which would be nominally Socialist but in practice not too "extreme," it was in such a party as the I.L.P. which we found even in 1900 declaring against a working class programme. This was assisted by the circumstance that, with the superior skill of the middle class, the I.L.P. had realised the value of "boring from within" the unions long before the Russian Revolution forced these tactics upon the proletarian revolutionary parties.

After the war this situation was exploited to the full. The great movement towards self-assertion, as a preliminary to the achievement of emancipation, which became visible in 1917 and 1918 (see par. 1), was realised by the

Labour Party leaders long before the Armistice. For the first time a programme ("Labour and the New Social Order") was drawn up and accepted (London Conference, February, 1918): and the programme was essentially a product of the I.L.P., recognisable, even if the process of its compilation were unknown, as the programme of a middle class organisation, and acceptable (as experience has since shown) to radical middle class parties which do not even assume to be a part of the Labour movement.

The door was opened still wider to the middle class in the days immediately after the Armistice, when both the older bourgeois parties seemed discredited and barren of hope by the new clause in the Constitution permitting individual membership. This clause was taken advantage of by the middle class more than any other, and it bore its fruit in the addition to the Labour Party's list of parliamentary candidates of men and women whose sole relation to the workers was that they subscribed with both hands to "Labour and the New Social Order."

This complete triumph of the middle class has not been without its effects even in the I.L.P. The proletarian elements in that party regard the middle-class domination of the Labour Party as a betrayal of the early traditions of the I.L.P. as expressed by J. Keir Hardie. With the opening of its ranks to individual membership, the Labour Party has now become a rival organisation to the I.L.P., and not a recruiting ground for the latter. Moreover, the inability to distinguish between the aims of the I.L.P. and the Labour Party is convincing larger numbers of the proletarians in the I.L.P. that there is no longer any justification for the continued existence of the I.L.P. as a separate organisation.

4. What caused this mass party—which, viewed historically, is an expression of the first attempt on the part of the British workers since the Chartist days to carry their economic struggle (defence of their material gains and hard-won privileges) over to the political field—to fall so completely under the domination of what is essentially a middle-class clique?

It is particularly important for all who are seeking to transform the leadership of the Labour Party and of the trade unions to get this clear. The explanation is that the British working class, like every working class emerging from capitalist slavery into the final forms of the struggle for emancipation, is not homogeneous. The difference of social origins—handicraftsmen, rural

workers, small shopkeepers, fallen members of the middle class—would be sufficient to explain why one section of the proletariat is more advanced than another; and why (in spite of the fact that the workers as a class are infinitely more homogeneous than are the middle classes, industrial capitalists, bankers, or aristocracy) *within* their class organisation the differences can be so great as to determine that a majority of more backward elements will accept a middle class leadership and programme over the heads of the more advanced minority.

But in the case of the British working class the oldest proletariat in history, its mixed origin has had time, comparatively speaking, to yield in importance to a new factor, which tends, however, to the same end. That factor is the development of capitalist society itself, which has both broken up the workers into a large number of differentiated trades, from highly specialised to unskilled, and has given them time to develop strongly-knit organisations of self-defence, each with a life and corporate interest of its own. We have seen how each of these organisations entered the political Labour movement for its individual advantage; and only after eighteen years' existence could a majority be persuaded that a common programme for Labour was essential. This is the sectarian attitude, the same absorption in one's own union as the be-all and end-all of the workers' struggle, that causes sectional or unco-ordinated strike movements in the industrial field, and is called by the Marxist "lack of class consciousness."

These two aspects of the same problem—lack of homogeneity in the working class—teach us the same lesson. (1) The Labour Party as such is not a bourgeois party. (2) The middle class leadership and programme of the Labour Party are the result of the insufficiently crystallised class-consciousness of the masses which compose it and believe in it. (3) Any organisation which wishes to rally the working masses around a working class leadership and programme must begin first and foremost by developing their class-consciousness, always taking account of different and varying stages of development. (4) This process will involve approaching the trade union rank and file with practical solutions for their own special problems, before they can begin to comprehend the need for attempting the solution of problems lying outside their immediate field of view. If they become convinced in the field of action that such an organisation understands their needs,

they then will be ready to listen to its theories (as at an earlier date they listened to those of the I.L.P.). (5) It may be that this process will necessitate, for the time being, that the organisation in question does not insist on pressing its full programme *in this sphere of activity*. But this is a price worth paying in return for gaining the ear of the masses, i.e., for receiving the only real opportunity of achieving that programme.

### § THE COMMUNIST PARTY

5. The Communist Party aims at being the party of the proletarian revolution, supplying both leadership and direction to the workers in their everyday struggles against capitalism, and providing a programme for them when they realise the necessity of ending once and for all the system of wage-slavery, together with its political and other superstructures. Its programme is that of the Communist International: the establishment of the dictatorship, or undivided rule, of the working class *politically*, as the sole safeguard of their control over the means of production and the sources of wealth. It considers with the Communist International that the programmes of the Labour Party, or the I.L.P., while outlining a series of extremely desirable objects, betray one fatal characteristic, damning them from the point of view of the working class—complete disregard of the realities of the present time, and particularly of the frame of mind of the capitalist class. The Communist Party sees the explanation of this primarily in the circumstances that both the ruling circles in the Labour Party and the I.L.P. are drawn from a middle class (petty-bourgeoisie) that is none the less middle class because it is engaged in the trade union business or has signed the membership form of an organisation calling itself a Socialist Party. The middle class is the most easily deluded of all by a skilful ruling class of capitalists.

The Communist Party finds the same lack of comprehension, this time of the frame of mind of the workers, and due to the same causes, in the day-to-day leadership of the Labour Party spokesmen—not only on industrial questions, but in all the political activities on which the voice of Labour should be heard, distinct and independent of other class opinions.

It is only this double impotence of the middle-class element, alternatively fooled and terrorised by capital, and with no confidence in the support of Labour, that

explains why it is that the Labour Party leaders again and again fail to make use of the opportunities lying ready to their hand for advancing the cause of the working class, and draw back in doubt and fear from a position that is half won.

The Communist Party loses no opportunity of making all this clear to the workers, in the interests of the workers themselves. The exposure of the Labour Party programme, and the advocacy of the Communist programme, is a matter of propaganda, and depends for its success as much upon the method of its conveyance as upon the substance of the exposure made and the proposals advocated. And this applies tenfold to criticism of the Labour Party leadership, which can only become effective if it is backed by constructive leadership of a positive nature.

In this way the very nature of the task before the Communist Party—the criticism of the Labour Party's programme and of its leadership—necessitates that the greatest care be taken that it reaches the ear of the masses in the primary organisations, the unions, upon which the organisation of the Labour Party reposes.

Thus, a study both of the class composition of the Labour Party and of the tasks immediately facing the Communist Party leads us to the same conclusion—with the same corollaries concerning concessions in the matter of pressing the ultimate programme of the Communist Party.

It is in the light of the preceding conclusions that we shall best approach the specific problems arising out of the relations between the Communist Party and the Labour Party.

## § THE COMMUNIST PARTY & THE LABOUR PARTY

6. The Communist Party, from the first day of its existence, has been asserting, and will continue to assert, its claim that as a working-class party it should be admitted to affiliation with the Labour Party. It never concealed from the whole working class that its object in so doing was to obtain a better opportunity of stating its case for a new programme of action and new leaders to apply it. At the same time it offered its loyal and disciplined support of the Labour Party Executive, after the majority had made its decision, in all matters arising out of the realisation in concrete terms of the Labour Party Constitution.

After a series of rejections of the Party's application, the Executive of the Labour Party carried at the Edinburgh Conference amendments to the Labour Party Constitution which seemed to set the seal upon the refusal.

The situation, however, has not been changed as far as the Communist Party is concerned. The substitution of working class for middle class leadership in the Labour Party is a task imposed upon the Communist Party by the realisation that that will be the supreme sign of clarifying class-consciousness on the part of the workers. The voicing of its programme and the winning of the confidence of the workers are tasks imposed upon the Communist Party by the very nature of its being. And practical experience shows us that the workers' confidence at the bottom cannot be won while attacks are being made on the Labour Party as such, nor the dominant clique of the Labour Party displaced while no serious attempt is made to win the workers' confidence at the bottom.

The Communist Party concludes that both theory and practice urge us to make concessions in the name of the future of the working class, and to show our willingness to give up any non-vital points at issue which may seem to justify, in the eyes of the rank and file of the Labour Party (the organised working class of Great Britain), the skilfully planned arrangement to exclude the Communists from their ranks. Such a concession has been the decision of the Communist Party Executive to withdraw all Communist Parliamentary candidatures where they would be in conflict with a candidature of the Labour Party.

The Communist Party is content to trust to the consciousness of the working class that local Communist workers have sufficiently proved their loyalty and ability to be put forward through union channels as official candidates for adoption by the Labour Party.

7. The possibility arises that even the latest concessions will not for the present succeed in gaining for the Communist Party access to the Labour Party, and the question arises in a new form: assuming that the Labour Party has ceased to be a federation open to all genuinely working-class organisations, and its leaders continue to press their present policy of closing its doors at every possible point to revolutionary parties, particularly the Communists, how is the Communist Party to act?

It is unnecessary in this connection to dwell on the

fact that, while the Communist Party is active in the industrial sphere, it will never lack spokesmen (not necessarily members of the Party) in the very heart of the Labour Party. Even acceptance by the unions of dictation from the L.P. Executive as to who shall and shall not be their delegates cannot much affect this circumstance.

What, however, should be the practice of a revolutionary proletarian party on the political field? The answer to this question was given by Lenin as long ago as 1920 in his "Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder," and with the necessary changes, has taken the form of the campaign for the "United Front" during the last six months. But it also follows logically from the Marxist analysis of the nature of the Labour Party and of the attitude towards it of the British working class.

Although the dominant faction is at the present time middle class, we have seen that in reality this circumstance is only a reflection of the heterogeneity and insufficient class consciousness of the masses who make up the membership. To address these masses with educational lectures pure and simple will be futile. In the history of a class it is experience that counts. It is the experience of coming nearer and nearer to political power that will both develop the self-confidence of the working class, and make it more exacting of its leadership. At the present time the working class believes that to approach a Labour Party majority, or a Labour Cabinet, is the same as to approach political power: and it will not be undeceived except by the test. Only then will the middle class element in the Labour Party be either forced to take a proletarian line of action, or show clearly that it is utterly alien to the spirit and determination of the working class.

In any case, therefore, when bye-election after bye-election to say nothing of other symptoms, shows that to the masses the Labour Party is their organisation, the step taken by the Executive of the Communist Party during the South Hackney Election, as the first move in a campaign to assist the Labour Party to come into power, is profoundly correct from the revolutionary point of view.

This does not mean that the Communist Party will sink its identity in the Labour Party. We know that the workers will cling to old institutions and old methods until their own experience reveals the limitation of outworn methods and inspires them to create the new. Then, and then only, will the masses turn to new forms of struggle

and involve the Labour Party in the new as certainly as in the old. The Labour Party cannot escape the action of the masses, or the masses escape the inherent demands of the class struggle.

To be with the masses struggling through the Labour Party to power, whether in Parliament or outside it, is a task the Communist Party cannot avoid. The work of the Communist Party to win to its ranks, by its own practical proposals, the best and strongest elements in the trade unions, and, conversely, to secure for itself sufficient working class confidence to acquire a guiding voice in the industrial organisations by means of election, will therefore go on. Its educational and propagandist work, with a view to gaining over into its membership all the most honest and revolutionary workers inside and outside the Socialist parties, will continue. Its organisation and its discipline will remain untouched. Still more, the Communist Party will work out and bring to the notice of the whole working class a programme of immediate and pressing measures dictated by the situation in which Labour finds itself after the Great War. This programme, while not constituting the final Communist view of what is necessary for the emancipation of the workers, will offer a genuine platform upon which all proletarian parties really devoted to the workers' cause can unite without contradicting any of their professed aims or prejudicing their ultimate achievement.

It will be the concern of the Communist Party that the workers should be able to test, by means of acceptance or non-acceptance of united action to achieve this programme (even should it involve Communist participation in a Government composed of all Labour organisations) or to achieve part of it as circumstances dictate (for example, the principles of the Berlin Agreement for a united front —no reductions in wages, a drastic fight against unemployment and longer hours, and recognition of Soviet Russia), which party is their friend and which their enemy.

#### 8. Summarising :—

- (1) The Labour Party is an organisation of the working masses.
- (2) It is dominated by a middle class element owing to the lack of class consciousness amongst the masses.
- (3) The development of class consciousness and the removal of the middle class element involve action, not merely propaganda.

- (4) In the industrial units of which the Labour Party is built up, the Communists will win confidence by their loyalty and the sound practicability of their proposals in action.
- (5) In the political field the faith of the workers in the present leaders of the Labour Party must be tried and outlived by experience. This experience the Communists will assist them to obtain by their *action*.
- (6) Action will involve the utmost concessions, consistent with Party independence in matters vital for its own life in the display of Communist readiness to combine with other parties in fighting the battle of the working class.
- (7) Action will involve the working out of a fighting programme for the British workers.

In this way, and in this way only, does the Communist Party hope and intend to lead the workers from one experience to another, from one conquest to another, until they are materially and psychologically ready to strike the last blow for emancipation and turn to the Communist Party for guidance as to how, when and where to strike it.

The Communist Party as an organisation seriously bent upon achieving the liberation of the working class, and considering that there is nothing which can compare in importance with this end, has no intention of striking attitudes of dignity any more than of making pretensions it cannot justify. Consequently, it will admit its mistakes when it makes them, discuss them in the public hearing of the working class, and on the basis of the lessons it draws—from its experience of its relations with the Labour Party no less than from all its other experiences—it will correct its tactics and continue to perfect its policy in keeping with what is demanded by the needs of the British working class in its struggle for the social revolution.

**Buy ALL your Books and Periodicals from the**

## **Communist Bookshop**

16 King Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2.



**HISTORY  
FICTION  
ECONOMICS  
SOCIOLOGY**

**BOOKS OBTAINED TO ORDER**

**HAVE YOU READ THIS BOOK ?**

## **"Communism & Society"**

*By WM. PAUL, Editor of Communist Review*

**200 PAGES PACKED WITH FACTS**

**PRICE 2/9 POST FREE**

*From Communist Party, 16 King St., Covent Garden, W.C.2*

**JUST OUT**

## **SECRETS of MENSHEVIK GEORGIA by J. SHAPIR ~**

With authentic copies of Documents taken from the Archives of the late Menshevik Governors  
**PRICE 1s. 6d. or 1s. 8d. POST FREE**

*From the COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICES at  
16, KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.2.*

# *The Communist Bookshop*

16 KING ST., COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.2



**COMMUNIST INDUSTRIAL POLICY**  
(New Tasks for New Times). Price 1d. Post free 2d.

**COMMUNIST PARLIAMENTARY  
POLICY**

(Containing also a draft electoral programme). A companion pamphlet to above. Price 1d. Post free 2d.



**WHAT IS THIS COMMUNIST PARTY ?**

This splendid little pamphlet has already had a sale of 25,000 copies and is still in great demand. Just the thing for the man who is willing to learn but has no time for larger books. Price 1d. Post free 2d. Third Impression. Thoroughly revised & brought up to date

**A.B.C. OF COMMUNISM by N. Buharin**

Theory set out in delightfully simple fashion. A book to read and keep. Price in paper cover 3/- Post free 3/6. In cloth 5/- Post free 5/7.

**BETWEEN RED AND WHITE by L. Trotsky**

Brilliantly written. Shows how Georgia was used against Soviet Russia by the Allied and other Imperialists. Price 2/- Post free 2/3.



**END OF  
TITLE**